

Docket Item #6
BAR CASE #2004-0211

BAR Meeting
November 3, 2004

ISSUE: Rooftop deck
APPLICANT: Mark W. Carter
LOCATION: 212 North Lee Street
ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the condition that the railing be a metal railing to match the railings on the front of the house at the second story.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness to add a roof deck on the flat center portion of the roof. From Lee Street, the three story brick faced house appears to have a gable roof, but the roof actually has sloped faces at the front and rear and a flat center portion approximately 18'9" wide by 24' deep. The deck will cover the flat area and will be surrounded on four sides by a 40" high PVC railing. The railing will have straight pickets and posts with flat caps. According to the applicant, a fascia board will cover the butt ends of the decking, the top of which will be no more than 10" above the surface of the roof. The deck will be accessed by an existing roof hatch.

The deck railing will be visible from across Lee Street. The alley to the north of the property is private.

II. HISTORY:

According to real estate records, the twin houses at 212 and 214 North Lee Street were constructed in 1977 in a modified Georgian Revival style. Based on BAR records, the Board does not appear to have reviewed alterations for either property.

The Board has reviewed a number of rooftop alteration cases for houses in the circa 1971 development to the north, bounded by North Union, North Lee, Queen and Oronoco Streets. The Board has expressed concern about the impact of the rooftop alterations, but has also approved a number of substantial alterations including rear additions, new dormers and several roof top decks. Like the twin houses at 212 and 214 North Lee Street, the houses in this nearby development are not historic buildings, but are compatible with the overall character of the historic district. The additions, alterations and roof decks generally have limited visibility from the public right-of-way.

Most recently, the Board approved a roof deck and rear dormer at 112 Quay Street (BAR Case #2003-0177, 9/3/03). The Board also approved roof decks at 105 Quay Street (BAR Case #2001-120 & 121, 7/18/01), 402 North Union Street (BAR Case #2000-0240, 11/15/00) and 115 Queen Street (BAR Case #2000-0008, 3/1/2000). On the other hand, on October 4, 2000, the Board denied a balustrade at 119 Quay Street which was proposed to hide a large skylight that had not been approved by the Board (BAR Case #2000-0183).

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed roof top deck complies with zoning regulations. Initial comments from Code Enforcement indicated that the chimneys would have to be raised to extend at least 2' higher than the top of the deck railing. Subsequently, Staff confirmed that this is not so, but that the railing, if of a combustible material such as PVC or wood, must not come in contact with the chimneys. The applicant has since provided a roof plan showing that the railing will be removed from the chimneys by the 2" required by code.

Staff believes a rooftop deck is acceptable for this property. Several other rooftop decks have been approved for similar non-historic houses in the same vicinity. A rooftop balustrade or railing is compatible with the Georgian Revival vocabulary of the house. While Staff has concerns about the potentially awkward appearance of only one of the pair of houses (212 and not 214 North Lee Street) having a railing, the railing is not likely to be very noticeable.

Staff does not believe that the use of PVC for the railing is acceptable, even for a building element as removed from public access as this railing will be. The applicant refers to the Board approved decks at 105 Quay Street and 402 North Union Street as having railings of the same material. However, as described in the case reports and as approved by the Board, these railings were to have been wood. Staff would prefer a wood railing or metal railing. The houses at 212 and 214 North Lee Street already have black metal railings on the second story french doors which could provide a precedent for the roof deck railing. In addition the more delicate metal railing might more readily recede from view.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the application with the condition that the railing be a metal railing to match that on the front of the house at the second story.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F - finding

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-2 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-3 Construction permits are required for this project. Plans shall accompany the permit application that fully detail the construction as well as layouts and schematics of the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems.
- C-4 Structural calculations are required to verify the ability of the existing roof to support the additional weight of the proposed deck.
- C-5 Deck clearance and chimney terminations shall comply with section R1001.6 of the International Residential Code. Chimneys shall extend at least 2 feet higher than any portion of the building within 10 feet, but shall not be less than 3 feet above the point where the chimney passes through the roof. This condition may impact both the applicant and the neighboring property owner's chimney.

Historic Alexandria:

"No comment."